

ON THE LITERAL MEANING OF *LEŚYĀ* *

0.0. It is a well-known fact that Jainism adopted the notion of *leśyā* from outside, from some or other milieu akin to that of the Ājīvikas setting forth, amongst others, a peculiar theory of *abhijāti*¹. No less certain, however, is the fact that the subsequent elaboration of the *leśyā* theory, as executed within the framework of the Jinist dogmatics (and that, naturally enough, in close association with the doctrine of *karma*), could not but obscure what must have been literally meant by the term *leśyā*, *les(s)ā* in its Prakrit form.

1.1. Let us be sure, at the outset, that *leśyā* pertaining to the dogmatic terminology is essentially an abbreviated appellation of « *karma-leśyā* », as is evident from the opening of the *Uttarajjhāyā*, chapter 34, dealing with this scholastic subject:

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1. Cf. H. JACOBI, *Jaina Sūtras*, II (= SBE, 45), pp. xxx; A. F. R. HOERNLE, *Ājīvikas* (in ERE, 1), p. 259 ff.; W. SCHUBRING, *The Doctrine of the Jainas*, Eng. tr., Delhi, 1961, p. 195 ff.; A. L. BASHAM, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, London, 1951, p. 245; E. FRAUWALLNER, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, II, Salzburg, 1956, p. 283; L. ALSDORF, *The Āryā Stanzas of the Uttarajjhāyā*, Wiesbaden, 1966, p. 214 ff.; V. M. BEDEKAR, *The doctrine of the colours of souls in the Mahābhārata*, in ABORI (1968), p. 329 ff.; J. DELEU, *Viyāhapannatti*, Brugge, 1970, p. 213. Opinion diverges on the question to know whether the relation between the Ājīvika's *abhijāti* and the Jinist *leśyā* was direct (Jacobi, Schubring, Frauwallner, Alsdorf) or not (Hoernle, Basham; also Bedekar, though implicitly). But the occurrence (attested, *Viyāhapannatti* 14-9, by Schubring and Deleu) of « *sukkābhijāie* » in the context of *leśyā* seems to me to strengthen considerably the first opinion.

lesajjhayaṇaṃ pavakkhāmi āṇupuvviṃ jahakkamaṃ /
chaṇhaṃ pi kammalesāṇaṃ aṇubhāve suṇeha me // 34.1 //².

Thanks to the criterium firmly established by Alsdorf³, we can safely affirm that, composed in *śloka*, this introductory verse belongs to the older stratum of the text, in contradistinction to the following « *dvāragāthā* » (v. 2) constituting a table of contents but which, being composed in *āryā*, is to be attributed to the later amplification.

1.2. Contrast of the same nature is perceptible between, on the one hand, vv.3-9 exposing the (*karma*)*leśyā* in terms of « colour » (*varṇa*) and, on the other, vv. 10-19 where « flavour » (*rasa*), « odour » (*gandha*) and « touch » (*sparsa*) come into question. Needless to say, it is the first set of seven *śloka* stanzas which stands for an initial phase of the dogmatic *leśyā*, of which six species (« Black », « Blue », etc.) are designated (v. 3) and described respectively by analogy (vv. 4-9)⁴. Thus, for the first two species:

<i>jīmūyaniddhasaṃkāśā</i>	<i>gaval'ariṭṭhasannibhā</i> /
<i>khaṃjaṇanayanānibhā</i>	<i>kiṇhalesāu vaṇṇao</i> // 34.4 //
<i>nīlaasogasaṃkāśā</i>	<i>cāsapicchasaṃmappabhā</i> /
<i>veruliyāniddhasaṃkāśā</i>	<i>nīlalesāu vaṇṇao</i> // 34.5 // ⁵ .

Besides *leśyā*'s association with *varṇa*, the faci may deserve our attention even here that analogy is marked predominantly with derivatives of $\sqrt{kāś-}$ or $\sqrt{bhā-}$, verbal roots meaning « to shine ».

1.3. Apart from the one quoted above (1.1), the only occurrence attested of the compound « *karma-leśyā* » is that of *Viyāhapannatti* 14-9:

2. « I shall describe the Lecture of the *leśyā* in due order successively. Hear my opinion about six *karmaleśyās* ».

3. Cf. ALSDORF, *op. cit.*, p. 216 in particular.

4. « Black » (*kiṇha*), « Blue » (*nīla*), « Grey (?) » (*kāū*), « Red » (*teū*), « Yellow » (*paṇha*), « White » (*sukka*). Reserving for a separate study the traditional explanation of *kāū* by *kāpota*, I have to stress here that Umāsvāti (*Tattvārthādhigamasūtra* IV.2.7.23) and subsequent authorities are definitely wrong in equating « *paṇha* » with Skt. *padma* and understanding thereby « red » colour: cf. J. CHARPENTIER, *The Uttarādhyaṇasūtra*, II, Upsala, 1922, p. 393; BEDEKAR, *op. cit.*, p. 332, n. 2; MUNI NATHMAL, *paṇha yā pamma*, in « Tulsī Prajñā » (1975), p. 105 ff. For, corresponding phonetically to Skt. *pakṣman*, this « *paṇha* » is no other than an abbreviation of « *pauma-paṇha* » (Skt. *padma-pakṣman*) or « filament of lotus » (yellow in colour). Decisive is the fact that, while one and the same text, the *Uvavāṇīyasutta*, presents « *paumapaṇha-gorā* » (in sū. 26) as well as « *paṇha-gore* » (in sū. 38), Abhayadeva comments both cases practically in the same way: the first, by « *kamala-garbha-kāntā pītā* »; the second, by « *padma-garbhas tadvad gaurāḥ* ».

5. « Regarding colour the black *Leśyā* looks as glossy as a rain-cloud, similar to a buffalo horn, (the fruit of) *aṣṭha* or the eye of the wagtail ». « Regarding colour the blue *Leśyā* is similar to the blue *Āśoka*, the tail of the *cāṣa* or looks as glossy as a cat's-eye gem ».

*jāo imāo caṁdimasūriyāṇaṁ devāṇaṁ vimāṇehiṁto lesāo bahiyā abhinissadāo, tāo obhāseṁti pabhāseṁti; evaṁ ee ṇaṁ Goyamā! te sarūvī sakammalessā poggalā obhāseṁti*⁶.

This passage affords us good grounds for believing that the concept of *karma-leśyā*, strictly Jinistic *leśyā*, is in its origin a counterpart, a transposition, on the earthly level of what was commonly known as *leśyā*, some specific component of the heavenly bodies deified, Sun and Moon in the present occurrence. A component which, while issuing, assures and determines manifestation yonder of sun or moon, here of each variety of substance on earth, cannot be foreign to « light » or « ray » all the less because the root $\sqrt{bhās-}$ is met with here repeatedly.

2.0. In fact, the word *leśyā* does appear with no dogmatic implication at all in the *Sūriyapaṇṇatti*, that 5th *upāṅga* which is reputed for its astronomical import.

2.1. Thus, chapter 20, when dealing with solar and lunar eclipses, runs:

*tā jayā ṇaṁ ete paṇṇarasa kasiṇā poggalā sadā caṁdassa vā sūrassa vā lesārubaddhacāriṇo bhavaṁti, tayā māṇusaloyaṁsi māṇusā evaṁ vadaṁti: evaṁ khalu rāhū caṁdaṁ vā sūraṁ vā geṇhaṁti*⁷.

It is essentially « light, lustre, splendour », not necessarily « disc », that Malayagiri understands by « *lesā* », which he renders by « *candra-sūrya-bimbagata-prabhā* ». For his reference to « *bimba* » corresponds, practically, to the mythical expression we already saw (1.3 above), « *vimāna* » or « flying palace » (from where *leśyā* streams forth)⁸.

2.2. More directly, the text itself seems to convince us that *leśyā* meant purely and simply « light », « *candra-leśyā* » being explicitly equated with « *jyotsnā* » in chapter 16:

*tā caṁdalesādī ya dosiṇādī ya, dosiṇādī ya caṁdalesādī ya, ke aṭṭhe? kiṁlakkhaṇe? tā egaṭṭhe egalakkhaṇe*⁹.

2.3. In the following passage of chapter 19, said of various heavenly bodies deified, association of *leśyā* with verbal notion « to shine, radiate, glow » ($\sqrt{bhās-}$, $\sqrt{dyut-}$, $\sqrt{tap-}$) is so conspicuous that no room seems

6. « As the *vimānas* or the palaces of the gods such as sun and moon remain shining so far as the *leśyā* or the light is being released from them, the *puḍgalas* or the substances are radiating only with the form and *karmaleśyā* ».

7. « When these fifteen entire substances always attend on the light on the surface of the disk of the sun and of the moon, it is said in the human world: The *Rāhus* capture the sun, or the moon, like that ».

8. So, even with Abhayadeva glossing « *caṁdassa lessaṁ āvarettāṇaṁ* » (in *Samavāyaṇiga* chapter 14) by « *leśyā dīptis, tatkāraṇatvān maṇḍalaṁ leśyā, tām āvṛtya* ». Cf. Seth, s.v. *lesa*, where the meaning « 2 » seems to me thus redundant.

9. « Then, what meaning and what kind of characteristics do the *caṁdalesā* etc. and *dosiṇā* etc. have? And what do the *dosiṇā* etc. and *caṁdalesā* etc.? They are synonyms and have the same characteristics ».

left for contesting Malayagiri's gloss, « (consisting in) lustre » (*prakāśarūpa*) or « heap of rays » (*raśmisaṃghāta*), over « *lesā* »:

*suhalesā maṃdalesā maṃdāyavalesā cittam̐taralesā aṇṇoṇṇasamogā-
ḍhāhiṃ lesāhiṃ, kūḍā iva ṭhāṇaṭhitā te, padese savvato samaṃtā
obhāseṃti ujjoṃeṃti taveṃti pabhāseṃti*¹⁰.

Solely, attention may be drawn to the fact that heavenly bodies with their respective *leśyā* are likened here to mountain peaks (*kūṭa*), which are not seldom depicted, especially in *kāvya* works, as glittering with mineral ores (*dhātu*) in which they abound. Such being the case, one can wonder, *leśyā* may have designated not so much « light » in general as something certainly luminous, but no less concrete (at least, conceived as such) than mineral ingredients.

3.0. When describing four classes of deities paying homage to Mahāvīra, the *Uvavāiyasutta* 22-26 resorts each time to this hagiographical cliché:

(1) *divveṇaṃ vannaṇaṃ* (2) *do gaṃdheṇaṃ* (3) *do rūveṇaṃ* (4) *do phāseṇaṃ* (5) *do saṃghayaṇeṇaṃ* (6) *do saṃṭhāṇeṇaṃ* (7) *divvāe idḍhie* (8) *do juṭe* (9) *do pabhāe* (10) *do chāyāe* (11) *do accie* (12) *divveṇaṃ teeṇaṃ* (13) *divvāe lesāe, dasa disāo ujjoṃemāṇā pabhāsemāṇā...*¹¹.

Taking notice here again of the roots √*dyut*- and √*bhās*-, none will doubt the practical synonymy of (13) *leśyā* with the five items which precede: (8-12) *dyuti*, *prabhā*, *chāyā*, *arcis*, *tejas* — all in the global sense of « lustre ». So with Abhayadeva, who ends his commentary with a remark of resignation:

*ekārthā vā dyutyādayaḥ śabdāḥ, prakāśaprakarṣapratipādanaparāś
ceti na paunaruktyam*¹².

In his preceding attempt, it is true, to differentiate the six items (8-13) by all means, the same commentator is seen to render *leśyā* by « *dehavarṇa* ». Likewise, according to Malayagiri who cites and comments the passage in question under *Jivāḍivābhigamasutta* 116, *leśyā* is « *deha-*

10. « (Outside the human world, the gods of the moon, the planets, the asterism and the stars,) having the pleasant light, the calm light, the calmly radiant light and the variedly mixed light, are well situated as the mountain summits and shine on the surrounding particles all around by their varied lights which permeate each other ».

11. The first seven items may be differentiated somehow like this: (1) « colour », (2) « fragrance », (3) « form », (4) « touch », (5) « osseous structure », (6) « harmonious proportion », (7) « majestic demeanour ». As to (8), v.l. « *juttie* » (*yukti*, « capacity »?), which is known to Abhayadeva but not to Malayagiri (referred to below).

12. « Or, these words, the *dyuti* etc. are the synonyms, all of which, being put together, show the predominance of the light. From this reason there would be no error of the tautology ».

varṇasundaratā »¹³. But, on the basis of such later comments, it will be little reasonable to allege a distinct (non-dogmatic) meaning « colour » for *leśyā*¹⁴, notwithstanding the ambivalence « lustre »/« colour » well attested of a few words like *chāyā* or *chavi*.

4.0. Out of the six words that we have admitted as meaning « lustre » in common (3.0 above: items 8-13), the last two, *tejas* and *leśyā*, are to be viewed from another angle now that we meet, in the *Viyāhapannatti*, with a compound form « *tejo-leśyā* ».

4.1. Thanks to M. Hara reputed for his masterly perusal over all epico-purāṇic and literary sources, we know this significant concurrence of words (documented by him fully and most convincingly): *tapas* — *tejas* — \sqrt{dip} -, \sqrt{dyut} - — \sqrt{dah} - — *kopa*¹⁵. To sum up in our necessary minimum, *tapas* or « heat-energy » is a kind of substance which an ascetic accumulates within him by means of penance and which has, for its outward manifestation, *tejas* or « glow-energy »; of this latter, which is likewise a substance and which « radiates », the coming into view and the setting in motion are caused oftenest by « anger » on the part of the ascetic, the target being « burnt » down as soon as the said substance has got thereon transferred.

4.2. It is this notion just described (4.1), pan-Indian to be sure, that the *Viyāhapannatti* reflects wherever *tava*- and *tea*- are found juxtaposed. To quote two instances (from chapter 15, sū. 553):

...Gosālassa vi Maṃkhaliputtassa tave tee samaṇassa bhagavao Mahāvīrassa vahāe sarīragamasi nisitthe samāṇe...;

...se Gosāle Maṃkhaliputte... evaṃ vutte samāṇe āsurutte Savvāṇu-bhūiṃ aṇagāraṃ taveṇaṃ teenāṃ... bhāsarāsiṃ karei¹⁶.

4.3. Notice should be taken here that, thrice at least throughout the same text, *tejas* with the said implication appears under an ampler designation, « *tejo-leśyā* ». Semantically, the second member *leśyā* does not seem to add anything noticeable. For one and the same scene (in chapter 15, sū. 543), that of Vaiśyāyana's attempt to murder Gosāla, is outlined first by the narrator:

13. For curiosity's sake, here is how the commentators (first Abhayadeva; then Malayagiri) pretend to interpret other items: (9) *yānādidipti*; *bhavanāvāsa-gatā prabhā* — (10) *śobhā*; *samudāya-śobhā* — (11) *śarīrastha-ratnādi-tejojvālā*; *svaśarīra-gata-r* — (12) *śarīra-saṃbandhirocis*; *śarīra-prabhava*.

14. Contra SETH, *loc. cit.*, meaning « 4 ».

15. Cf. M. HARA, *Koten-Indo no Kugyō* or « Penance in Classical India » (Tokyo, 1979), pp. 113-31 et *passim*; also *Transfer of Merit*, in ALB, 31-32 (1968), p. 382 ff.

16. « ...Gosāla Maṃkhaliputta's ascetic power (*taya*, *tapas*) or overwhelming lustre (*taya*, *tejas*) being released on Lord Mahāvīra's body for killing him... ». « ...told thus, Gosāla Maṃkhaliputta got angry and, with his power of penance (*tapas*), that is, glowing power (*tejas*), reduced the ascetic Savvāṇubhūi to a heap of ashes... ».

... *Gosālassa Maṃkaliputtassa vahāe sarīragamaṃsi teyaṃ nissirai*¹⁷, but reappears in more detail, this time in the mouth of Mahāvīra conversing with Gosāla:

... *se Vesiyāyaṇe bālatavassī tume doccaṃ pi taccaṃ pi evaṃ vutte samāṇe āsurutte jāva paccosakkittā tava vahāe sarīragamaṃsi teyalessaṃ nissirai*¹⁸.

4.4. Little after this last passage, Mahāvīra assures Gosāla that a certain series of temperance and mortification enables one, in six months, to possess within himself *tejo-leśyā* condensed in abundance:

*je naṃ Gosālā! egāe saṇahāe kummāsapimḍiyāe egeṇa ya viyaḍāse-naṃ, chaṭṭhaṃchaṭṭheṇaṃ aṇikkhittenaṃ tavokammenaṃ, uddhaṃ bāhāo pagijjihiya jāva viharai, se naṃ aṇṭo chaṇhaṃ māsāṇaṃ saṃkhittaviula-teyalessa bhavai*¹⁹.

4.5. Elsewhere, always in the same text (chapter 7, sū. 230), *tejo-leśyā* is mentioned in company, on the one hand, with that ascetic's anger which is believed to have much to do with *tejas* (cf. 4.1 above) and, on the other, with that set of verbs « to shine » which we have seen in more than an occurrence of *leśyā* (cf. 2.3, verbatim; also 1.3 and 3.0):

... *kuddhassa anagārassa teyalessā nisaṭṭhā samāṇī... jaḥiṃ jaḥiṃ ca naṃ sā nipatai, taḥiṃ taḥiṃ ca naṃ te acittā vi poggalā obhāseṃti ujjoṇeṃti taveṃti pabhāseṃti*²⁰.

As is still more remarkable here, it seems that this *leśyā* penetrates into what it has fallen upon, making this latter blaze in consequence — even in case, let us note, this may be a « senseless substance » (« *acittā vi poggalā* »), in other words, « inanimate entity » (*ajīva*) in all likelihood. Conversely, is it not implied here that a sentient being, *a fortiori* a man, manifests himself by virtue of his own inborn *leśyā*?

5.1. Seen from the general background as previously exposed (4.1), the last two paragraphs (4.4-5) tempt us anew to this fancy (suggested already 2.3, *in fine*) that *leśyā* might hardly be « light, lustre » in general,

17. « ... he releases the *teya* on Gosāla Maṃkaliputta's body for killing him... ».

18. « ... that foolish ascetic Vesiyāyaṇa, being thus told by you again and again, got angry and, having taken a few steps backward, released the *teyalessā* on your body for killing you (Gosāla) ».

19. « Gosāla! One who eats only a handful of *kummāsa* (*kulmāsa*: a kind of black beans) with husks, drinks a cup of water containing no living thing, practises the *chaṭṭhaṃchaṭṭha* (penance with the repose of every three days) and thus passes time with his hands held aloft, such a one can, in the course of six months, have plenty of *teyalessā* condensed ».

20. « ... wherever, being released, the *teyalessā* of an angry ascetic... falls down, even lifeless substances shine forth there ».

but « substance-like lustre » as it were. Let us say, more precisely, « lustre inherent in and concomitant with something solid and concrete », and, as the word-form obliges, this « solid and concrete » will not be anything other than *leśa* or « particle, molecule », that is, minimum organic component conceivable, as the case may be, of a heavenly body (cf. 2.0-3), of a god or semi-god (also 3.0), of a human being (4.5, *in fine*), even of *tejas* or « glow-energy » as substance (4.1; *tejo-leśyā*, 4.2-4), ultimately of *karman* (*karma-leśyā*, 1.1-3) which is, notoriously enough with Jainas, a kind of substance.

5.2. All that may amount to our acquiescence in Schubring's view of *leśyā* as secondary derivative of *leśa*, and that in the sense of « *leśyā chāyā* » or « molecular lustre/coloration » (cf. 3.0, *in fine*)²¹. For the native etymology alleging the root √*śliṣ-* « to attach », thus « *śliṣyate prāṇī karmanā yayā, sā leśyā* », is obviously out of place since it is not until a certain stage of elaboration of the (*karma*)-*leśyā* theory, in the Jinist dogmatics, that one can speak of *leśyā* as something like cement bringing about « union of a being with (infusing) karmic substance »²². Recently, with *leśyā* « lustre » certainly in view, N. Tatia alludes to a homonymous root √*śliṣ-* meaning « to burn »²³, but such is only so much bluff because « *śliṣu* (dāhe) », *Dhātupāṭha* 1.734, proves to be a sheer invention intended for explaining the medical term *śleṣman* « phlegm » (as regards a salient feature of the humour thus designated)²⁴.

5.3. To return to Schubring's etymology, however, it is worth-while noting that the word *leśyā* is ascribable less to a normal secondary derivation from *leśa* in Sanskrit (where should be expected **laiśya-*, feminine in -ī, whence **les(s)ī chāyā* in Prakrit), than to an ulterior Sanskritisation of *les(s)ā* (*chāyā*), derived earlier from *lesa* absolutely in Prakrit²⁵. Seeing that its earliest occurrences do not go back beyond Upanishadic texts and that, without producing any noticeable word by secondary derivation, it is used for the most part in such idioms, seemingly of popular usage, as « *leśato 'pi (na)* » (« not) even a bit », Sanskrit noun *leśa* itself may have been a Prakrit loan, presupposing either Oriental

21. Cf. also SCHUBRING's review of BASHAM, *op. cit.*, in ZDMG, 104 (1954), p. 258.

22. Thus Abhayadeva, commenting *Thāṇḍya* 1-51. He remarks also « *śleśa iva varṇabandhasya karmabandhasthitividhātṛyaḥ* »: « (*Leśyās* are) those which bring about the fixation and duration of the *karma*, like paste of lime regarding to the fixation of colour paint ». Cf. SCHUBRING, *The Doctrine...*, p. 115, n. 3.

23. Cf. M. L. BAMTHIA, *Leśyā-kośa*, Calcutta, 1966, Foreword by N. Tatia, p. 22.

24. Cf. *Kṣīrataraṅgiṇī ad loc.*

25. With what Old Indic root is Pkt. radical *lis-* to be connected? The question, where lies the ultimate etymology of Skt. *leśa* itself, is obviously far beyond my own competence. What follows is nothing but a fancy on the part of the sheer stranger to linguistics that I am. Still, just in the same way, a word like *veśyā* « prostitute » seems to me explicable by Sanskritisation of Pkt. *vessā* (*iṭṭhī*, understood), « woman of quarters » (?), admitting naturally this difference that, here, Pkt. *vesa* presupposes Skt. *veśman* whose etymology is perfectly clear.

leśa or pan-Prakritic *leśa*. Once this last term had come into use, in a popular but semi-sophisticated milieu, with a view to accounting for the radiance of heavenly bodies each with its own coloration, there arose the secondary derivative *les(s)ā* (*chāyā*, understood) corresponding to the notion of « molecular lustre/coloration »; this notion, if not the word itself, was then exploited by heterodox materialists, Ājīvikas for one, so as to propound their fatalistic view that a man's social status or occupation must be determined by the inborn coloration of the molecules composing his body; finally, having adopted such a view, Jainas endeavoured to transform it in a new ethical setting, in this sense that the determinant *les(s)ās* were henceforth regarded as things *a posteriori*, that is, coloured karmic atoms which human acts must needs attach to the doer's bodily constitution. Although utterly conjectural, such a succession of stages seems to have preceded the dogmatic systematisation of Jainism, carried out later on more in Sanskrit than in Prakrit. It is only at this last stage, and that exclusively within the Jinist milieu, that the word *leśyā* could come into existence by (hyper-)Sanskritisation of the pre-existent Prakrit vocable *les(s)ā*.